

Age discrimination at work

The global phenomenon of aging populations is set to continue (Gavrilov & Heuveline, 2003; Rosti, 2006). Increased longevity is a significant achievement of humankind. The decrease of child birth can also be seen as a positive trend, in the perspective of a sustainable development, but both these phenomena create economic and social problems that are very difficult to manage. Moreover, there are conflicting trends in the labour markets of western societies: though reforms of pension systems seek to encourage the retention of older workers, there is the continued tendency for organizations to 'release' older workers from their jobs.

The European Council of Stockholm (2001) stated that half the population aged between 55 and 64 should have a job by 2010. In 2002, the European Council of Council of Europe Barcelona decided that, by the same date, the retirement age should be raised by five years at least (Rosti, 2006, 142). Italy also introduced reforms to its pension system and raised the retirement age. Yet, alongside these changes, we continue to witness a large number of 'older' workers being fired, particularly when companies restructure or out-source operations (AAVV2003; Bombelli e Finzi, 2006).

Particular attention should be given to the gender composition of 'older' work forces. In all European countries, Russia, USA, Canada and Japan, the number of women over 65 greatly exceeds that of men. This difference widens with age (Gavrilov & Heuveline, 2003; Houdart-Blazy, 1997): women comprise around two-thirds of older populations. In Italy, the percentage of women working is among the lowest in Europe. In the first quarter 2007, there were about twice as many women as men among the unemployed aged 15 to 64 (ISTAT, 2007). This might be considered a high risk factor in relation to dependence and poverty of women in old age.

This research aims to identify and explore discriminatory practices relating to age in various work settings, as well as practices that promote the inclusion of older workers. The project, carried out by the agencies CRIS & ADTAL, also aims to create an international network of researchers into age discrimination. This aims to support grassroots groups combating age discrimination, and influence legislation and policies at national and international levels.

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